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ABSTRACT

When adequately elaborated, the basic method of Gestalt therapy can be traced to the phenomenological field theory of Gestalt psychology. Gestalt therapy differs from Gestalt psychology not because of a difference in philosophy or method, but because of different contexts; the clinical context has different demands than those of basic research. Phenomenological field theory, the method of both Gestalt psychology and therapy, is characterized by: (1) reliance on the total immediate experience; (2) a search for insight into the inherent structure of the segregated whole which is the experiential field of perception; (3) systematic experimentation to obtain a description true to the structure of the phenomena being studied; (4) the search for insight into the awareness process itself; and (5) intentionality. Gestalt psychology is largely a content psychology. Gestalt therapy transforms the Gestalt method into a psychology system that is both act- and content-oriented; it is an existential psychotherapy. Gestalt therapy shifts the emphasis of Gestalt psychology from essence to existence. Dialogue is most appropriate to this phenomenological-existential psychotherapy. The dialogic relationship in Gestalt therapy is marked by inclusion, presence, commitment to dialogue, non-exploitiveness, and a full living dialogue. These philosophical principles form an integrating framework that is the primary identity of Gestalt therapy. (Author/NRB)

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GESTALT THERAPY:
ITS INHERITANCE FROM GESTALT PSYCHOLOGY

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Gestalt Therapy: Its Inheritance From Gestalt Psychology[1]

Gary M. Yontef, Ph.D.[2]

Gestalt therapy started as a revision of classical psychoanalysis (Perls, 1947, 1948; Polster, 1975b). It quickly became a whole and autonomous system for integrating wisdom from diverse sources into a unified clinical methodology (Perls, Hefferline and Goodman, 1951). Clinical, developmental and characterological concerns and important perspectives from psychoanalysis were utilized in a framework that was very different from psychoanalysis as it was then constituted (particularly as a treatment modality). In formulating the Gestalt therapy system, the Gestalt concept was essential.

However, doubts have been raised as to whether the Gestalt therapy system has much to do with Gestalt psychology. Some even find Gestalt therapy and Gestalt psychology contradictory in essential outlooks (Sherrill, 1974; Henle, 1978). It is the position of this writer that the basic methodology of Gestalt therapy is directly descended philosophically, if not historically, from Gestalt psychology. Emerson and Smith "believe that no one can understand Gestalt therapy well without an adequate background in Gestalt psychology (1974, p.8)." We will discuss the basic principles so derived and also the existential philosophy Gestalt therapy

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uses in its clinical application of the Gestalt method.

There are conditions that have contributed to the estrangement between Gestalt psychologists and Gestalt therapy and to a general misunderstanding of Gestalt therapy. One factor has been the erroneous equating of Gestalt therapy with Fritz Perls, as if Gestalt therapy were "Perlsian." Perls' style was often unscholarly and brash. His knowledge and understanding of Gestalt psychology was limited. His popular, cliche-level statements have attracted attention and have been treated by many as representing Gestalt therapy. This style is antithetical to any good scholarship, including the careful scientific approach of the classical Gestaltists. Moreover, taken without careful definition and without adequate, overall Gestalt therapy perspective, some of these statements not only appear discrepant from Gestalt psychology, but are internally contradictory as well.

Not all Gestalt therapy is Perlsian (Dubin, 1976; Dolliver, 1981). Gestalt therapy was founded not only by Fritz Perls, but by Laura Perls (who was well founded in Gestalt psychology), Isadore From, Paul Weisz, Paul Goodman and others (L. Perls, 1976, 1978; Rosenfield, 1978). Subsequently, many others have had a major influence, e.g., Erv and Miriam Polster (1977), James Simkin (1976), Joseph Zinker (1977). An excessive amount of publicity is still being given to Fritz Perls. Moreover, it is Perls' popular writings that have received attention, to the neglect of his and others' more scholarly efforts that are more satisfactory theoretically (e.g., Perls, Hefferline and Goodman, 1951).

Another factor has been the paucity of advanced texts in Gestalt therapy and the lack of a clear and well differentiated model of Gestalt therapy. If Gestalt therapists do not clarify what Gestalt therapy is, those making

comparisons between Gestalt therapy and other systems will have difficulty doing an adequate job. At present, there is an increased attention to model building in Gestalt therapy and the future of Gestalt therapy depends in large measure on the success of this effort (Yontef, 1981a, 1981c).

The present paper is intended as a synopsis of those principles of the Gestalt therapy system derived from Gestalt psychology and an indication of the relation of these to Gestalt psychology. Since this is only a synopsis, elaboration will be kept to a minimum.

It would be singularly inappropriate to compare Gestalt therapy and Gestalt psychology in a narrow-gauge, piecemeal manner. Exact details that may be similar or different between the two are less important than the structure of the whole. This is the Gestalt way. Using words in common (e.g., figure/ground) or differing on the emphasis given a particular aspect of the field (e.g., organismic variables) can show neither a basic connection nor a disconnection between the two.

Although one could take the views of the Gestaltists of the Berlin School (Wertheimer, Kohler, Koffka) as an orthodoxy, and use them to judge entitlement to the term Gestalt, it would be more useful to compare what the Berlin School Gestaltists were doing in their context with what Gestalt therapists do in their context. From that perspective it is easier to gain insight into the essential relatedness of Gestalt therapy and Gestalt psychology.

The Gestalt approach of both Gestalt movements is a form of phenomenological field theory. At its core is a mode of exploration (Wertheimer, 1938, p.3). At this point we can foreshadow our later discussion by noting two aspects of this method: 1) It is based on trusting immediate, naive

experience. This means including all data of experience, objective and subjective, internal reports and external observations. 2) It seeks insight into the functional interrelationships that form the intrinsic structure of the whole of any situation being studied (Kohler, 1969).

This method is in marked contrast to the chief modes of research to which Gestalt psychology provided an alternative. (For overview see Heidbreder, 1933 and Wertheimer, 1945.) The introspectionism of Wundt and Titchener did not trust immediate ("naive") perception, but rather believed it was based on error. People had to be trained to know the "truth," i.e., that people only perceive qualities and attributes (e.g., line, color, form) and learn to infer and label and form these into meaningful objects. We do not see objects such as a chair or table but need to be taught. Subjects in introspectionist research were taught to report the qualities and attributes of "pure" perception. Thus, not only did the introspectionists not trust immediate perception, but they also had an atomistic outlook. Mind, for example, is not a whole but the sum of its contents.

The behaviorists were also atomistic with their Stimulus-Response theory and they also mistrusted or excluded what research subjects said they experienced. Subjective data of experience were especially and explicitly excluded. (Kohler, 1947, e.g., p. 34.)[3]

In a clinical context, Gestalt therapy faced a similar situation. Psychoanalysts of the time (1940's) strove to understand the whole patient but had a theory that distrusted the conscious experience of patients,[4]

[3]Currently this is less true as some behaviorists focus on the "O" of S-O-R.
[4]This is not as true of some current psychoanalysts under the influence of Heinz Kohut.

was mostly dualistic, atomistic and Aristotelian in its search for noumena, and envisioned man as motivated by forces beyond his control (Stewart, 1974). When behaviorists first entered the clinical practice scene they were still atomistic and disdainful of experience. Neither approach utilized the power of the patient's immediate experience as the tool for exploration (i.e., phenomenological focusing) and neither included all types of data (Yontef, 1969, 1976).

Gestalt therapy had the same task as Gestalt psychology, but in a different context. Wertheimer said that to do the same thing in a different context you have to do it differently (Wertheimer, 1945). Gestalt therapy differs in many aspects from Gestalt psychology not because of a difference in philosophy or method, but because of different contexts. The same figure has different meanings as a function of the ground (context). The clinical context has different demands than that of an academic psychologist doing basic research. For example, in basic research the researcher determines what to look at. In psychotherapy the patient presents the data, himself/herself and his/her phenomenology.

Both Gestalt psychology and Gestalt therapy search for insight into the forces that provide the inherent structure of the situation, process or event being studied. Both include all types of data, as they are experienced and meaningfully embedded in the contemporary situation.

In the remainder of the paper we sketch the Gestalt method of Gestalt psychology and Gestalt therapy, phenomenological field theory, and then the application of this method in the Gestalt therapy mode of existential psychotherapy.

Phenomenological Field Theory

1. Immediate Experience of the Perceiver

"There seems to be a single starting point for psychology, exactly as for all the other sciences: the world as we find it naively and uncritically." (Kohler, 1947, p. 7.)

What is studied in a field approach is phenomena, i.e., that which is given in experience rather than noumena, i.e., forces assumed or inferred to be behind the presenting phenomena. The field method of study is descriptive, it describes what and how (structure and function). This compares to an analytic or classification approach such as the Aristotelian approach which focuses on causation of the "why" variety (Lewin, 1935).

The Gestalt field approach is phenomenological (Yontef, 1969, 1976). It studies the "field" as experienced by a person at a moment. Phenomenology takes as its only data what is immediately and naively experienced at a moment (Idhe, 1977; Kohler, 1947; L. Perls, 1976).

In the field approach all phenomena are regarded as lawful and the proper subject of investigation. No phenomena are classified as chance, not even unique or non-repetitive events (Lewin, 1935; Kohler, 1947, 1969).

In phenomenological terms, any event can be studied or experienced. "As experienced" does not mean only or mostly "subjective" or "feeling." It includes "objective" experience or exteroception as much as emotions and other "subjective" experience. The systematic observation of behavior is as inherent to phenomenology as is clarification of feelings.[5] Not only does the phenomenological therapist observe, trust and expedite the total experience of the patient, but he/she pays special attention to what aspect

[5]Thus Gestalt therapy's emphasis on observable behavior is not "behavioristic" but rather is an inherent aspect of its phenomenology.

of the patient's experience is inhibited or neglected. Those items that are currently important and outside the patient's current awareness are brought into awareness.

Since phenomenological exploration is based on experience, it is absolutely essential that what is experienced be differentiated from elements assumed, posited, learned or inferred. Wertheimer refers to this as experience "undebauched by learning" (Wertheimer, 1945, p.211). Husserl refers to this as bracketing (Idhe, 1977). Biases, e.g., metaphysical biases, biases about what constitutes data, personal values, are put aside or "in brackets" during the phenomenological investigation to allow the subject to experience what is "given" in the situation without contamination.

One of the most publicized and least understood aspects of Gestalt therapy is its emphasis on "now." Phenomenological field theory locates the experience of the perceiver in time and space -- here and now. This means that the process of being aware always takes place in the here and now, although the object of awareness may be there or then. According to Einstein, in the field theory of modern physics there is no action at a distance -- that which has effect is present contemporaneously and concretely (Einstein, 1950, 1961; Koffka, 1935; Lewin, 1935). For example, the patient who experiences feelings of abandonment by his mother discusses this in the therapist's office. Remembering and feeling happen in the here and now of the therapy hour, but the object of the experience happened in the past. The emphasis on the present in Gestalt therapy is a direct influence of Gestalt psychology (Wallen, 1970).

What is immediate or pertinent is relative to an observer and not absolute. For the field theory of Einstein in the study of motion it is

relative to a reference body that is considered stationary. In phenomenological field theory which field is being studied is defined by the experience of some observer. In choosing the topic of study some individual (scientist, subject, therapist or patient) defines the subject and within that field the exploration proceeds on the basis of what is experienced.[6]

Summary. The Gestalt approach is a field phenomenological approach in that it describes rather than assumes or explains. Immediate awareness is used to gain insight into the basic structure of the field. Biases, such as the biases of introspectionism, are bracketed. In Gestalt therapy the goal is consistent with this in that awareness is our only goal (Yontef, 1969, 1981b; Simkin, 1974).

For example, a patient's troublesome behavior and the patterns of reinforcement associated with it are proper subjects for a Gestalt therapist's phenomenological investigation. Suggesting a modification of that behavior or reinforcement schedule as an experiment, a means to gain insight, (i.e., awareness: for definition, see Yontef, 1976 and below) is quite in line with the phenomenological attitude. Trying to recondition the behavior as an end goal without regard for insight is not a phenomenological approach.[7]

Example: Patient believes he is unloveable unless perfect. The exploration of this thought is vital for his therapy work. Undoubtedly,

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[6]The field may be that of the experience of a participant in an organism/environment field, e.g., one of the participants in a dialogue. It can be the field as defined by the experience of a third party observer who considers himself/herself outside the interaction being studied. That "outside" observer is also part of an organism/environment field that includes the interaction being studied, the "outside" observer, and the interaction between observer and observed.

[7]Such an approach may produce behavioral change and lead to a gain in awareness. However, the method is not phenomenological. It is likely to be an example of a "black-box" behavioristic theory.

his therapist, Gestalt therapist or otherwise, does not hold that belief about this patient. The Gestalt phenomenological approach would explore the topic but refrain from making the choice for the patient that it is an irrational thought and likewise refrain from reconditioning the patient. The exploration might include, but not be limited to, inquiry into relevant historical experiences; dialoguing with a person who rejects or has rejected him for being imperfect; disclosing contrary data (e.g., observation of an imperfection in the patient coupled with expression of the therapist's reaction to the patient; exploring the patient's feelings toward a loved but imperfect Other; describing his "perfect self;" imagining a "good parent" who loves him unconditionally; making a statement confirming or opposing the "irrational" thought and observing bodily and emotional reactions.

2. Inherent Structure

> The basic premise of Gestalt psychology is that human nature is organized into patterns or wholes, that it is experienced by the individual in these terms, and that it can only be understood as a function of the patterns or wholes of which it is made. (Perls, 1973, p. 3-4.)

It is a very basic and essential Gestalt belief that experience is structured rather than piecemeal (Wertheimer, 1938b, 1945). This is a finding of phenomenological exploration and is a necessary support for the faith involved in experimenting, bracketing and trusting experience. This is consistent with the general field notion of the universe being orderly and determined (Einstein, 1950, 1961).

We perceive in segregated wholes. We see objects standing out (figure) or differentiated from a ground and also internally differentiated into

parts. We do not see isolated stimuli as Titchener and some early behaviorists believed. Nor do we see the world as one giant whole ("a big, blooming, buzzing confusion") as William James would have it.

Some properties of the whole are emergent and not inherent in any single part (Emerson and Smith, 1974). A whole has qualities of its own and is not merely a sum or aggregate ("and-summative") of the constituent parts (Wertheimer, 1938b). Thus: the whole is more than a sum of its parts. But more than that, the whole is a field that determines its parts (Kohler, 1969).

> There are wholes, the behavior of which is not derived by that of their individual elements, but where the part processes are themselves determined by the intrinsic nature of the whole. (Wertheimer, 1938, p. 2.)

Moreover, meaning is an inherent part of a Gestalt, including a perceptual Gestalt. It is not added on. This Gestalt view joins the mechanistic determinism of materialism with the idealist meaning of vitalism (Koffka, 1935; Kohler, 1947). Each event has both order and meaning and is perceived as such.

Multiple forces in functional interrelationship to each other and to the whole make up the field (Lewin's Principle of Relatedness, Lewin, 1935). These forces provide structure that is not just mechanical, but dynamic and inherent in the field (Koffka, 1935; Kohler, 1947, 1969). There is an inner unity (Wertheimer, 1938). It is only when there is a "concrete mutual dependency" between the parts that a whole is a meaningful whole rather than a "purely summative" grouping of parts (Wertheimer, 1938b).

Another aspect to the field outlook is that the field is not composed

of isolated parts or particles surrounded by empty space and affected at a distance by other particles.

> Empty space as mere geometrical nothingness vanished from physics, being replaced by a definitely distributed system of strains and stresses... (Koffka, 1935, p. 42. See also, Einstein, 1950, 1961.)

Energy is an aspect of the total field. A change in any part of such a field affects the rest of the field since the particles are a part of a field of continuous energy. Any change "ripples" through the field. The order is not mechanically imposed as a concrete channel directs water. The order is in the dynamic of the field forces.

An example of the utility of this approach can be seen with the application of the principle of Prägnanz to problem solving. The Principle of Prägnanz holds that the field forms itself in as orderly a way as is possible, i.e., with as much cleanness and definiteness, directedness and economy, stability and strength, as the global conditions allow. A situation which contains a problem also contains its solution (Wertheimer, 1945). Thus in psychotherapy the description of a situation via phenomenological focusing and dialogue yields a solution inherent in the situation.

This notion of the structure of the whole is a key to the goal of Gestalt therapy. Gestalt investigations seek an understanding of the structural features of the field. The goal is insight, structural clarity (Wertheimer, 1945; Kohler, 1947). In Husserlian Phenomenology there is a similar emphasis (Idhe, 1977).

This writer previously defined awareness and discussed it as the goal of Gestalt therapy (Yontef, 1976). I would now add that the awareness which is sought in psychotherapy aims for insight as defined by Gestalt psychology:

> Insight is a patterning of the perceptual field in such a way that the significant relations are apparent; it is the formation of a Gestalt in which the relevant factors fall into place with respect to the whole. (Kohler, cited in Heidbreder, 1933, p. 355.)

2a. Structure of the Field and "Organismic" Factors

Some have discussed the relation of Gestalt psychology and Gestalt therapy as if Gestalt psychology believes that the structure of the field is a function of external factors while Gestalt therapy believes that the important factors are internal, i.e., "organismic," (Sherrill, 1974).

Both Gestalt groups conceive of whole situations including external and internal forces (Kohler, 1938; Perls et al., 1951). The whole is bipolar rather than dichotomous or undifferentiated. In Gestalt therapy language, we study the organism/environment field. The field as a whole has multiple determining forces. Which ones are emphasized depends on the actual situation being studied. What is figural depends on the task at hand.

The situation includes individual and external (other people, society, inanimate forces) factors. When studying the process of basic perceptions, e.g., the perception of objects as objects, the situation is largely determined by an immediate connection between the perceiver as a whole and what is "out there." Perception at this level is not primarily learned or determined by organismic factors. A table is readily perceived as a table regardless of organismic interest, feelings, etc. However, if one studies ambiguous stimuli in subjects whose motivation level is raised, e.g., hungry subjects, perception is likely to be influenced by their motivation state. This is a function of the whole situation. Experimentally, if one studies the interruption of tasks and the unfinished Gestalt one will see the effect of the

external event, i.e., the interruption. But results vary depending on such "organismic" factors as how ego-involved the subject is in the task.

In psychotherapy we are constantly dealing with situations more complex than the ideal situation for basic research. Organization in that situation and other situations at a similar level of complexity means that some stimuli will command more organismic energy than others and the individual organizes his perception. The situation is controlled by organismic and external variables. The difference between Gestalt psychology and Gestalt therapy on this matter is only in the context in which they operate. For example, Kohler, a Gestalt psychologist, discusses the organization of his own awareness process just as a Gestalt therapist would.[8]

It is universally known that therapists in general and Gestalt therapists in particular work to increase patients' sensitivity to what they feel. It is not as widely known that the Gestalt theory of Gestalt therapy calls for an equal emphasis on sensitizing patients to the external situation.

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[8]"...the whole development must begin with a näive picture of the world. This origin is necessary because there is no other basis from which a science can arise. In my case, which may be taken as representative of many others, that näive picture consists, at this moment, of a blue lake with dark forests around it, a big, gray rock, hard and cool, which I have chosen as a seat, a paper on which I write, a faint noise of the wind which hardly moves the trees, and a strong odor characteristic of boats and fishing. But there is more in this world: somehow I now behold, though it does not become fused with the blue lake of the present, another lake of a milder blue, at which I found myself, some years ago, looking from its shore in Illinois. I am perfectly accustomed to beholding thousands of views of this kind which arise when I am alone. And there is still more in this world: for instance, my hand and fingers as they lightly move across the paper. Now, when I stop writing and look around again, there also is a feeling of health and vigor . But in the next moment I feel something like a dark pressure somewhere in my interior which tends to develop into a feeling of being hunted -- I have promised to have this manuscript ready within a few months." (Kohler, 1947, p. 7.)

Self awareness without world awareness deals only with part of the organism/environment field.

Wertheimer (1945) discusses a woman who has a problem at work. At first he is unable to understand the situation since her discussion is so self-preoccupied that she focuses on her feelings and she does not describe the whole situation. Some people mistakenly think that Gestalt therapy would duplicate this woman's neurosis. Self-preoccupation is not insight producing.

On the other hand, there are clinical situations in which the client adequately describes the external situation and does not know his or her own emotions, wants, needs, or thoughts. A contribution of Gestalt therapy is its application of the insights of Gestalt psychology to the awareness of bodily, emotional, and motivational processes (Wallen, 1970). The Gestalt exploration aims for structural clarity (insight) and lets the actual deficit determine which variables are focused on.

3. Systematic Experimentation

The phenomenological field approach utilizes systematic experimentation to find a description that is true to the structure of the phenomena being studied. Idhe calls this the "variational method" (Idhe, 1977). Phenomenology uses experimentation rather than interpretation as the chief tool for research or therapy. Experimentation enables one to sense for oneself what is fitting or true (Simkin, 1974).

This writer believes that all Gestalt therapy techniques are a means of experimentation. This contrasts experimenting with a behavior modification program. For example, asking someone to repeat and say louder something said in therapy is, by this notion, not aimed at catharsis (although that might happen) but to aid in increasing awareness. In repeating and shouting

the patient might, for example, discover what he feels and how intensely and how he subdues his feeling. The particular intervention is only a part of an overall phenomenological exploration whose goal is to raise the level of awareness.

Systematic experimentation can be used to study any phenomenon that is experienced. The field is a unit of study that is defined by an observer. In Gestalt therapy the field is chosen by clinical relevance. The utility of the Gestalt method so applied is limited by the clinical acumen of the Gestalt therapist.

The phenomenological field method makes special note that the observer is part of the situtation. This involves three aspects.

1. How one sees is in part a function of how one looks. To look "naively" as the Gestaltists advocate yields a very different experience than introspecting. To look without bias, i.e., with bracketing, takes discipline.

2. The observer affects the object of his study. In modern physics they have found that measuring or observing changes the physical event being studied. The patient or subject who is being observed is somehow affected by being observed. He/she is not exactly the same as before the observation. In Gestalt therapy this is dealt with by utilizing dialogue between patient and therapist. The human subject can report his experience of the effect of being observed.

3. No one can see it all. One can only be clear about what vantage point is being used to describe what aspect of the phenomena.

4. Awareness of the Awareness Process

The Gestalt approach has a special emphasis on understanding the process

of gaining awareness or insight (Wertheimer, 1945; Perls et al., 1951, 1973).

Insightful awareness is always a new Gestalt and is in itself curative (Perls et al., 1951; Yontef, 1976). The formation of the new Gestalt, in which "the significant relations are apparent" and the "relevant factors fall into place with respect to the whole," is a process that happens naturally without Gestalt training. When it does not, when habit patterns and unself-conscious efforts do not yield insight, Gestalt training can use phenomenological exploration to gain an understanding of the insight/awareness process.

The ability to form this insightful new Gestalt is essential to successful organismic self regulation. To be aware in a structure-clear, rather than a structure-blind, manner is most important. This means to be aware of self and situation with respect to that task or issue which most needs the attention of consciousness (Yontef, 1969, 1976).

Ideally the awareness process has the quality of a good Gestalt. The figure is sharp and is perceived in clear relation to the ground. The figure shifts in a manner appropriate to the situation, reflecting the dominant need or salient feature of the situation. The figure is neither too fixed or rigid nor does it shift too rapidly.

As the sophistication of the phenomenological subject or patient grows, the emphasis shifts from straightforward awareness (e.g., emphasis on some social problem) to more reflexive awareness, i.e., awareness of straightforward awareness (Idhe, 1977). Reflexive awareness leads to awareness of one's overall awareness process. In Gestalt therapy this sophisticated phenomenological attitude leads to insight into character structure and into

the pattern of avoidance of awareness.[9]

In the discussion of the existential applications of the Gestalt method we will see how this phenomenological emphasis in Gestalt therapy shifts from the awareness process to a more comprehensive focus on the existence of the perceiving person as a person.

In superior quality Gestalt therapy a piece or segment of work is a figure that is related to a larger background picture that minimally includes straightforward awareness, awareness of the awareness process itself, the character structure of the patient, a comprehensive picture of the patient's existence and the nature, strength and development of the patient-therapist relationship. Piecemeal work tends to be structure-blind, hence, not productive of insight. Again the acumen of the therapist is essential.

5. Intentionality

The phenomenological approach is based on intentionality. Awareness is always awareness of something. There is a correlation ("intentional correlation") between the perceiving and the perceived. The split of subject and object is joined into a unified polarity of perceiving and perceived. The thought that the person creates perception mostly from his own need is contrary to intentionality. On the other hand, there is no external world humanly experienced without a perceiving person. Without the world I would not know I; without I, there is no world humanly conceived.

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[9] Idhe discusses the incorporation of the phenomenological attitude into ordinary perceiving as "phenomenological ascent" (Idhe, 1977, p. 128). The person who has incorporated the phenomenological attitude perceives with increased clarity, is open to and expects to find a variety of facets to any situation, and is sensitive to when one is clear or not clear about the structure of a situation. With phenomenological ascent one tends not to limit the experience of a situation to a single, narrow vantage point.

The Existential Application of the Gestalt Method

Gestalt therapy took from psychoanalysis a sensitivity to certain developmental and characterological themes. It took the phenomenological field method largely from Gestalt psychology. The application of the Gestalt method in Gestalt therapy is given philosophical direction by existentialism. This phenomenological-existential approach supplies the theory of relationship in Gestalt therapy and gives direction to the awareness work.

Gestalt therapy is an existential psychotherapy (Van Dusen, 1968, 1975a, 1975b, 1975c; D. Edwards, 1977). Like most existential approaches, it is based on the phenomenological method. Gestalt therapy moved the Gestalt method into the existential direction for much the same reason as Heidigger, Sartre, and others moved the Husserlian phenomenological approach in an existential direction (Idhe, 1977).

Gestalt psychology, as Husserl's phenomenology, is largely a content psychology. Gestalt therapy transforms the Gestalt method into a psychology system that is both act and content oriented. In an act psychology attention shifts to the person who perceives and experiences. The interest shifts in the existential manner to the structure of the person's opening to the intentional correlation, i.e., to the person and how he meets the world.

Gestalt therapy differs from Gestalt psychology in that in Gestalt therapy the emphasis shifts from essence to existence, especially the existence of individual persons. The reality that is of most importance in Gestalt therapy is being -- people as they live. Gestalt psychology views people as unique and whole, hence, the special inappropriateness of studying people with a reductionistic attitude. However, the emphasis has been on aspects such as perception or cognition rather than the person qua person and

the whole of his/her experience.

The application of the phenomenological method to the study of individual persons as persons and their existence resulted in the discovery that only by dialogue with other persons as persons do humans truly define themselves. People exist only in constant relationship to each other.

"Truly" define oneself is one important key to understanding the existential attitude. Phenomenological-existential explorations reveal that people live in an unstated context of belief. This learned habit of conventional thought forms a sediment that muddies the immediate experience of the world as it is and the self as it is (Idhe, 1977). The definition of self based on a clear and accurate immediate experience enables one to know what one is responsible for and to know what choices one is making. This is what is referred to as authenticity. Clouding one's perception of self based on sediment is self-deceptive (Sartre, 1966).

Gestalt therapy utilizes the Gestalt phenomenological field method of exploration to increase the patient's support in putting sediment aside and sharpening awareness so that choices will be made based on responsibility and authenticity. Full awareness and self-deception are antagonistic concepts (Yontef, 1976).

The Gestalt view of perception provides additional support for personal responsibility. Since the ground contains many possible figures, it is the individual who organizes a complex experiential field for himself/herself. For example, when an unfinished situation clamors for attention and competes for attention with other aspects of the field, the individual regulates which will be foreground. "Only I can feel my feelings, think my thoughts, sense my sensations, and act my actions. Only I can live me" (Emerson and Smith, 1974, p. 9).

The Dialogic Relationship

Dialogue is the particular form of contact most appropriate to a phenomenological-existential psychotherapeutic relationship. Contact is thoroughly discussed in the Gestalt therapy literature (Perls, 1947, 1973; Polster and Polster, 1973; L. Perls, 1976, 1978). Here we will just note that contact entails an acknowledgement of another person. Dialogue, i.e., the I-Thou form of contact, is a form of contact based on authenticity as discussed above. Interpersonally, I-Thou contact means treating the other as a person equally capable of authenticity and worthy of being treated as an end rather than a means to an end. Doing that usually entails saying what one means and meaning what one says.

All psychotherapeutic relations are built on caring. The underlying warmth and acceptance of the psychoanalytic relationship are expressed through the medium of a relationship marked by the rule of abstinence. In Gestalt therapy the caring, warmth and acceptance are manifest through a dialogic relationship (Yontef, 1969, 1976, 1981a, 1981b, 1981c; Simkin, 1974; Rosenfield, 1978; L. Perls, 1976, 1978; Jacobs, 1978).

Five characteristics mark this dialogic relationship (see Yontef, 1981b).

1. Inclusion. This is putting oneself as fully as possible into the experience of the other without judging, analyzing or interpreting while simultaneously retaining a sense of one's separate, autonomous presence. This is an existential and interpersonal application of the trust in immediate experience that is the heart of phenomenology. Kohut's alteration of psychoanalysis to emphasize empathy moves psychoanalysis in this direction. The practice of inclusion provides an environment of safety for the patient's

phenomenological work and, by communicating an understanding of the patient's experience, helps sharpen the patient's self awareness.

2. Presence. The therapist expresses the therapist rather than abstaining from expressing his self. He regularly, judiciously and with discrimination expresses his observations, preferences, feelings, personal experience, thoughts, etc., as a part of the therapeutic relationship. Thus, the therapist can share his perspective by modeling phenomenological reporting thereby aiding the patient's learning about the trust and use of immediate experience to raise awareness. If the therapist relies on theory-derived interpretation, rather than personal presence, he leads the patient into using phenomena not in his immediate experience as the tool for raising awareness.

3. Commitment to Dialogue. The contacting process is a whole that is more than a sum of the people involved and even more than a sum of inclusion and presence. Beyond contacting the other and expressing one's self is a commitment to and ultimately a surrender to an interpersonal process. This is allowing contact to happen between rather than controlling the contact and the outcome. Wertheimer (1945) states that finding the solution that is inherent in the situation requires wholehearted desire for and commitment to the truth in the situation rather than any previously held belief or attitude.

4. No Exploitation. Any form of exploitation is at variance with the dialogic relationship (Yontef, 1981b). Exploitation influences the patient's experience to adjust to a goal of the therapist rather than protecting the integrity of the patient's actual experience.

5. Dialogue Is Lived. Dialogue is something that is done rather than talked about. "Lived" emphasizes the excitement and immediacy of doing. The

mode of dialogue can be dancing, song, words or any modality that expresses and moves the energy between the participants. An important contribution of Gestalt therapy to phenomenological experimentation is enlarging the parameters to include explication of experience by nonverbal expression of it. For example, directly expressing love to a loved one rather than reporting about it, may lead to feeling and showing the love with a wholeness unmatched by words alone.

Summary

When adequately elaborated the basic method of Gestalt therapy can be traced directly to the phenomenological field theory of Gestalt psychology. The chief characteristics of this method are : 1. reliance on the total immediate experience, here-and-now with biases put in brackets; 2. a search for insight into the inherent structure of the segregated whole which is the experiential field of perception; 3. systematic experimentation to obtain a description true to the structure of the phenomena being studied; 4. seeking insight into the awareness process itself; 5. intentionality. The relation of "organismic" factors to the total field was discussed.

The existential application of the Gestalt method was discussed. The method changed emphasis from the content to the act of consciousness, from the search for essence to the existence of the perceiver.

The paper delineated the development of an existential attitude which regards people as both inextricably bound to other people and also inevitably confronted with the phenomenological existential task of discriminating between the immediate and authentic on the one hand and self-deception, confusion and bias on the other.

Also discussed was the dialogic relationship as the type of psycho-

therapeutic relationship appropriate to a phenomenological-existential therapy and its characteristics of inclusion, presence, commitment to dialogue, non-exploitiveness and a full living dialogue.

These philosophic principles form an integrating framework that is the primary identity of Gestalt therapy. Particular therapeutic techniques, therapeutic style and the usual cliches are of so little importance that they could be eliminated without diminishing the essential nature of Gestalt therapy. One of the beautiful features of Gestalt therapy is that it is a framework that can be applied in a rich variety of styles. (Polster, 1975a; L. Perls, 1976, 1978; Zinker, 1977; Simkin, 1974; Yontef, 1976, 1981a, 1981b, 1981c; Melnick, 1980). The principles can be applied in any modality (e.g., individual, group, workshop, conjoint, family) and with appropriate professional precautions and modifications can be applied to any diagnostic group. It can be applied to group process as well as individual-oriented therapy. Moreover, this list in no way exhausts the possibilities. What is important is the overall integrity of the existential phenomenological field method.

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